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ABSTRACT

An analysis of the first three annual rounds of the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997, sponsored by the Bureau of Labor Statistics of the U.S. Department of Labor, was conducted to determine the employment experiences of youth. (The survey includes a nationally representative sample of about 9,000 young men and women who were born during the years 1980 to 1984. These respondents were ages 12 to 17 when first interviewed in 1997 and the oldest were age 20 when interviewed a third time in 1999-2000.) Results from the survey of these youths classify them into one of two job categories: those with "employee" jobs, in which they had an ongoing formal relationship with a particular employer; and those with "freelance" jobs in which they performed one or a few tasks for several people. Highlights of the findings include the following: (1) nearly 65 percent of working students who were age 15 at the beginning of the 1998-99 school year worked at an employee job some time during both the school year and the following summer, as did 75 percent of working students age 16 and 78 percent of working students age 17; (2) the percent of students employed during any week of the 1998-99 school year and in the following summer remained steady from September to February, increased in the spring, and peaked in July; (3) female youths were less likely than male youths to hold an employee job while age 15, but by age 17, the gender gap disappeared; and (4) youths who worked exclusively at freelance jobs while age 14 were very likely to continue working at freelance jobs while age 15, but were more likely to move to employee jobs by age 16. (KC)

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EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCE OF YOUTHS: RESULTS FROM THE FIRST THREE YEARS OF A LONGITUDINAL SURVEY

Youths who work at an early age are more likely to continue working as they get older. Eighty-five percent of youths who engaged in work activities while age 14 continued to work while age 15, and 90 percent of youths who worked while age 15 continued to work while age 16.

These findings are from the first three annual rounds of the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997, which is sponsored by the Bureau of Labor Statistics of the U.S. Department of Labor. The survey includes a nationally representative sample of about 9,000 young men and women who were born during the years 1980 to 1984. These respondents were ages 12 to 17 when first interviewed in 1997, and the oldest were age 20 when interviewed a third time in 1999-2000. The survey provides information on the employment experiences, schooling, family background, social behavior, and other characteristics of these youths.

This release focuses on the employment experiences of these youths. Results from the survey classify youths into one of two job categories: Those with "employee" jobs, in which youths have an ongoing formal relationship with a particular employer, such as a restaurant or supermarket; and those with "freelance" jobs, in which youths perform one or a few tasks for several people, such as babysitting or yard work, but have no formal job arrangement with any "boss." Highlights from the longitudinal survey include:

- Attachment to the formal or "employee" labor market often forms while in high school. Nearly 65 percent of working students who were age 15 at the beginning of the 1998-99 school year worked at an employee job at some time during both the school year and the following summer, as did 75 percent of working students age 16 and 78 percent of working students age 17.
- The percent of students employed during any week of the 1998-99 school year and in the following summer remained fairly stable from September to February and increased during the spring. The percent employed then rose sharply in early summer, peaking during July. (See chart.)
- Female youths were less likely than male youths to hold an employee job while age 15. By age 17, this gender gap disappeared. Nearly 80 percent of male and female youths held an employee job while age 17. (See table 2.)
- Youths who worked exclusively at freelance jobs while age 14 were very likely to continue working at freelance jobs while age 15. As youths moved from age 15 to age 16, however, they became more likely to move from freelance jobs to employee jobs.

Youths in Employee Jobs During the 1998-99 School Year and the Following Summer

Working while in school was fairly common among high school students during the 1998-99 school year. Moreover, the percent of enrolled youths who worked at an employee job at some point during the school year was substantially higher at each successive age. (See table 1.) The percent of enrolled youths who worked in an employee job during the 1998-99 academic year ranged from 44 percent for youths who were age 15 at the beginning of the school year to 67 percent for those who were age 16 and to 78 percent for those who were age 17.

Attachment to the formal or "employee" labor market often forms while in high school. Of all students who worked, nearly 65 percent of those who were age 15 at the beginning of the school year worked during both the school year and the following summer, as did 75 percent of working youths age 16 and 78 percent of working youths age 17.

A different measure of youth employment during the 1998-99 school year and the following summer is the percent of enrolled youths working each week. (See chart.) For 15-, 16-, and 17-year-olds, the week-by-week incidence of employment remained relatively stable between September and February, increased in the spring, and accelerated in early summer to a peak in mid-summer. Employment dropped sharply at the end of the summer.

The percent of youths working during a given school week in the fall was twice as large at age 16 as at age 15. About 20 percent of youths who were age 15 at the start of the 1998-99 school year worked during a typical week in the fall, as did about 40 percent of youths who were age 16. About 50 percent of enrolled youths who were age 17 at the beginning of the school year worked during any given school week in the fall. During the employment peak in mid-summer, the differences narrowed in the proportions of 15-, 16-, and 17-year-olds who were employed.

Work Activity of Youths While Ages 15, 16, and 17

Eighty-three percent of youths worked in some capacity while age 17. (See table 2.) Youths at this age increasingly entered formal work arrangements, working more in employee jobs and less in freelance jobs. The percent of youths who worked at an employee job while age 17 was twice as large as the percent of youths who worked at an employee job while age 15. Likewise, the percent of youths who worked at freelance jobs while age 17 was less than half the percent who worked at freelance jobs while age 15.

Forty-three percent of male youths held an employee job while age 15, compared with 35 percent of female youths. Female 15-year-olds were much more likely than their male counterparts to work at freelance jobs (47 percent versus 32 percent). By age 17, nearly 80 percent of both male and female youths held employee jobs, although female 17-year-olds were more likely than their male counterparts to combine freelance work with employee jobs.

Older youths were not only more likely to work in employee jobs, but, when they did work, they also worked more weeks. While age 17, youths worked in employee jobs an average of 34 weeks, compared with an average of 24 weeks for employed 15-year-olds. (See table 3.)

Differences in employment activities are apparent by race and Hispanic origin. Among 15-year-olds, 45 percent of non-Hispanic whites held an employee job, compared with 27 percent of non-Hispanic blacks and 28 percent of Hispanics. Regardless of race or Hispanic origin, the percent of youths who worked at an employee job was substantially higher at age 17 than at age 15. The percent of non-Hispanic

blacks and Hispanics who worked at employee jobs while age 17, however, remained well below that of their non-Hispanic white counterparts. When employed, non-Hispanic black youths and Hispanic youths worked fewer weeks than did non-Hispanic white youths. For example, among those age 17, employed non-Hispanic white youths averaged 35 weeks of work, non-Hispanic black youths averaged 28 weeks of work, and Hispanic youths averaged 30 weeks of work.

Employment at Successive Ages

Youths who worked at one age were more likely to work at the following age. Eighty-five percent of youths who engaged in work activities while age 14 continued to work while age 15; 90 percent of youths who worked while age 15 continued to work while age 16; and 91 percent who worked while age 16 continued to work while age 17. (See tables 4, 5, and 6.) Only one-third of youths who did not engage in work activities while age 14 worked while age 15. By comparison, 58 percent of youths who did not work at age 15 engaged in work activities while age 16, and 57 percent of youths who did not work at age 16 worked while age 17.

Freelance jobs often act as a stepping stone into the formal labor market. Among youths who worked exclusively at freelance jobs while age 14, 58 percent of them worked exclusively at freelance jobs while age 15, 9 percent worked exclusively at employee jobs, and 18 percent worked at both freelance and employee jobs. As youths move from age 15 to age 16, they become more likely to work at employee jobs. Among youths who worked exclusively at freelance jobs while age 15, only 29 percent worked exclusively at freelance jobs while age 16; 36 percent went on to work at both freelance and employee jobs; and 22 percent worked exclusively at employee jobs.

As youths who did not work at an early age grow older, the pathway to employment is less likely to include a freelance job. Two-thirds of youths who were not employed while age 14 did not work while age 15, but those who did enter the labor market when they reached age 15 were twice as likely to work exclusively at employee jobs than at freelance jobs or to combine freelance work with employee jobs. Among youths who did not work while age 15 or 16, nearly half entered the labor market directly into employee jobs when they reached the following age.

A Portable Document Format (PDF) version of this news release is available online at http://www.bls.gov/nls/.

Technical Note

The estimates in this release were obtained using data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997 (NLSY97). The NLSY97 is the newest survey in the National Longitudinal Surveys program. The NLSY97 collects extensive information on youths' labor market behavior and educational experiences. Information about respondents' families and communities also is obtained in the survey.

This survey is conducted by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago and the Center for Human Resource Research at The Ohio State University, under the direction and sponsorship of the Bureau of Labor Statistics of the U.S. Department of Labor. Partial funding support for the survey is provided by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention of the U.S. Department of Justice, the Office of Vocational and Adult Education of the U.S. Department of Education, and the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Sample

The National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997 is a nationally representative sample of 8,984 young men and women who were ages 12 to 16 on December 31, 1996. This sample is composed of two subsamples: a cross-sectional sample designed to represent the noninstitutionalized, civilian segment of young people living in the U.S. in 1997 and born between January 1, 1980, and December 31, 1984; and a supplemental sample of youths designed to oversample Hispanic and black youths living in the U.S. in 1997 and born between January 1, 1980, and December 31, 1984. The third round of annual interviews took place between November 1, 1999, and May 1, 2000, and all results are weighted using the third-round survey weights that correct for oversampling and nonresponse. When weighted, the data represent all Americans living in the U.S. in 1997 and born in the years 1980 to 1984.

Sample size varies both between and within tables. For example, in table 2, to be included in the section "While age 15," which refers to the entire year between an individual's 15th and 16th birthdays, a youth need only to have reached his or her 16th birthday. To be included in the similar category in table 5, which relates employment status while age 15 with employment status while age 16, a youth must have reached his or her 17th birthday.

Interaction between time and age in a longitudinal survey

Because the NLSY97 is a longitudinal survey, meaning the same people are surveyed over time, the ages of the respondents change with each survey round. It is important to keep in mind this inherent link between the calendar years and the ages of the respondents. For example, tables 4, 5, and 6 report employment by age, contingent on the previous age's employment. The youngest respondents in the sample (birth year 1984) were these ages during 1999-2000, whereas the oldest respondents (birth year 1980) were these ages from 1995-98.

Definitions

Freelance job. A freelance job involves doing one or a few tasks without a specific "boss," like babysitting or mowing lawns, or working for oneself.

Employee job. An employee job is one in which the youth has an ongoing relationship with a particular employer, such as working in a supermarket or restaurant.

The respondent is read the following introduction prior to survey questions about freelance and employee jobs:

"We are going to discuss two sorts of jobs with you. We'll call one type working as a freelancer or being self-employed: that is, working one or a few tasks for several people and not having a 'boss' (for example, babysitting or mowing lawns) or working for yourself (for example, running a business)."

"We'll refer to the second type as working as an employee: that is, you had an ongoing relationship with a particular employer (for example, working in a supermarket or restaurant, or being in the military)."

Age categories. The term "while age x" refers to the entire year between birthday "x" and the following birthday. The estimates shown in this release for each age category exclude respondents who had not yet reached their next birthday at the time of the interview—and thus were not able to provide the full year's worth of information for that age. For example, "While age 15" refers to the entire year between an individual's 15th and 16th birthdays. The category excludes individuals who had not yet turned age 16 at the time of the interview.

1998-99 school year and following summer. The school term is defined as the period from September 1998 through May 1999. The summer is composed of June, July, and August of 1999.

Enrolled. Individuals were not considered enrolled if they received a high school diploma before April 1999 or if they were not enrolled for a period of two or more consecutive months during the school year.

Race and Hispanic origin. In this release, the findings are reported for non-Hispanic whites, non-Hispanic blacks, and Hispanics. These groups are mutually exclusive but not exhaustive. Other race groups, which are included in the overall totals, are not shown separately because their representation in the survey sample is not sufficiently large to provide statistically reliable estimates. In other BLS publications, estimates are published for whites, blacks, and Hispanics, but these groups usually are not mutually exclusive. The term "Hispanic" is considered to be an ethnic group, and Hispanics can be of any race. Most other BLS publications include estimates for Hispanics in the white and black race groups in addition to the Hispanic ethnic group.

Information in this release will be made available to sensory-impaired individuals upon request. Voice phone: 202-691-5200; TDD message referral phone: 1-800-877-8339.

Table 1. Percent of enrolled youths with an employee job during the 1998-99 school year and the following summer by age, sex, race, Hispanic origin, grade in school, and timing of employment

Age as of September 1, 1998, and characteristic	Percent of students who ever worked	Percent who worked during school year			Percent who worked during summer only
		Total	Worked during school year and summer	Worked during school year only	
Total, age 15	59.4	44.1	38.5	5.6	15.3
Male youths	61.7	47.1	41.5	5.6	14.6
Female youths	57.0	41.0	35.3	5.6	16.1
White non-Hispanic	67.4	50.9	45.2	5.7	16.5
Black non-Hispanic	45.0	28.2	22.3	6.0	16.8
Hispanic origin	45.4	35.8	29.3	6.5	9.7
Grade 9	46.5	33.8	25.8	8.0	12.6
Grade 10	64.7	47.8	43.0	4.8	17.0
Total, age 16	77.4	67.0	58.2	8.8	10.4
Male youths	78.5	67.0	59.8	7.3	11.5
Female youths	76.2	67.0	56.4	10.6	9.3
White non-Hispanic	82.5	73.1	64.8	8.3	9.4
Black non-Hispanic	66.1	52.7	44.0	8.8	13.3
Hispanic origin	67.6	57.9	45.7	12.2	9.7
Grade 10	72.5	58.7	50.0	8.7	13.8
Grade 11	80.3	71.0	63.4	7.6	9.2
Total, age 17	86.6	77.7	67.4	10.3	8.9
Male youths	88.4	78.3	67.8	10.5	10.2
Female youths	84.7	77.1	67.1	10.0	7.6
White non-Hispanic	90.1	82.6	74.0	8.6	7.5
Black non-Hispanic	79.3	66.1	52.3	13.9	13.2
Hispanic origin	77.4	69.2	57.2	12.0	8.2
Grade 11	81.3	71.9	63.0	8.9	9.4
Grade 12	89.2	78.7	69.8	8.9	10.5

NOTE: The National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997 consists of young men and women who were ages 12 to 16 on December 31, 1996. Race and Hispanic-origin groups are mutually exclusive but not exhaustive. Other race groups, which are included in the overall totals, are not shown separately because their representation in the survey sample is not sufficiently large to provide statistically reliable estimates. The school year is defined as September 1998 through May 1999, excluding the last full week of December 1998 and the first week of January 1999. Summer is defined as June, July, and August of 1999.

Table 2. Percent of youths employed while ages 15 to 17 in 1995-2000 by age, sex, race, Hispanic origin, and type of job

Age in 1995-2000 and characteristic	Percent employed in:					
	Any job	Any employee job	Any freelance job	Employee jobs only	Freelance jobs only	Both employee and freelance jobs
Total, while age 15	64.0	38.8	39.0	25.0	25.2	13.9
Male youths	62.4	42.6	31.8	30.6	19.7	12.0
Female youths	65.7	34.9	46.6	19.1	30.8	15.8
White non-Hispanic	71.8	44.6	44.5	27.3	27.2	17.3
Black non-Hispanic	46.0	26.7	26.4	19.6	19.3	7.1
Hispanic origin	49.4	27.6	29.0	20.3	21.7	7.3
Total, while age 16	78.4	68.1	29.2	49.2	10.4	18.9
Male youths	78.2	69.4	23.1	55.1	8.8	14.3
Female youths	78.7	66.7	35.8	42.9	12.1	23.7
White non-Hispanic	85.0	74.5	33.2	51.8	10.5	22.7
Black non-Hispanic	62.7	53.3	19.7	43.0	9.4	10.3
Hispanic origin	67.1	57.5	21.5	45.6	9.6	11.9
Total, while age 17	83.0	77.7	17.6	65.4	5.4	12.3
Male youths	81.9	78.1	13.3	68.6	3.8	9.6
Female youths	84.2	77.2	22.1	62.1	7.0	15.1
White non-Hispanic	88.8	83.0	20.0	68.7	5.8	14.3
Black non-Hispanic	68.2	63.3	13.0	55.2	4.9	8.1
Hispanic origin	74.1	71.2	10.5	63.6	3.0	7.5

NOTE: The National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997 consists of young men and women who were ages 12 to 16 on December 31, 1996. Race and Hispanic-origin groups are mutually exclusive but not exhaustive. Other race groups, which are included in the overall totals, are not shown separately because their representation in the survey sample is not sufficiently large to provide statistically reliable estimates.

Table 3. Percent of youths ages 15 to 17 in 1995-2000 with an employee job and average number of weeks worked, by age, sex, race, and Hispanic origin

Age in 1995-2000 and characteristic	Percent with an employee job	Average number of weeks worked
Total, while age 15	38.8	24.3
Male youths	42.6	25.1
Female youths	34.9	23.3
White non-Hispanic	44.6	25.5
Black non-Hispanic	26.7	19.1
Hispanic origin	27.6	21.2
Total, while age 16	68.1	28.7
Male youths	69.4	28.8
Female youths	66.7	28.7
White non-Hispanic	74.5	30.0
Black non-Hispanic	53.3	24.5
Hispanic origin	57.5	26.1
Total, while age 17	77.7	33.6
Male youths	78.1	32.7
Female youths	77.2	34.6
White non-Hispanic	83.0	35.3
Black non-Hispanic	63.3	28.4
Hispanic origin	71.2	30.4

NOTE: The National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997 consists of young men and women who were ages 12 to 16 on December 31, 1996. Race and Hispanic-origin groups are mutually exclusive but not exhaustive. Other race groups, which are included in the overall totals, are not shown separately because their representation in the survey sample is not sufficiently large to provide statistically reliable estimates.

Table 4. Employment status of youths while age 15 in 1994-2000 by their employment status at age 14

(Percent)

Employment status while age 14	Worked while age 15				Did not work while age 15
	Total	Employee jobs only	Freelance jobs only	Both employee and freelance jobs	
Total					
Worked	85.3	26.8	36.3	22.2	14.7
Employee jobs only	82.6	73.0	3.1	6.5	17.4
Freelance jobs only	84.5	8.7	57.7	18.1	15.5
Both employee and freelance jobs	91.5	21.4	13.5	56.6	8.5
Did not work	33.7	22.1	9.5	2.1	66.3
Male youths					
Worked	85.0	35.7	29.3	20.0	15.0
Employee jobs only	84.9	76.1	2.7	6.1	15.1
Freelance jobs only	83.0	11.2	55.1	16.7	17.0
Both employee and freelance jobs	89.7	25.4	12.8	51.5	10.3
Did not work	33.1	23.7	7.6	1.8	66.9
Female youths					
Worked	85.6	18.2	43.1	24.4	14.4
Employee jobs only	77.9	66.7	3.9	7.3	22.1
Freelance jobs only	85.5	7.0	59.5	19.1	14.5
Both employee and freelance jobs	93.5	16.7	14.3	62.4	6.5
Did not work	34.5	20.3	11.6	2.5	65.6

NOTE: The National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997 consists of young men and women who were ages 12 to 16 on December 31, 1996.

Table 5. Employment status of youths while age 16 in 1994-2000 by their employment status at age 15

(Percent)

Employment status while age 15	Worked while age 16				Did not work while age 16
	Total	Employee jobs only	Freelance jobs only	Both employee and freelance jobs	
Total					
Worked	89.9	49.4	13.5	27.0	10.1
Employee jobs only	89.9	84.1	1.5	4.3	10.1
Freelance jobs only	87.0	21.5	29.4	36.2	13.0
Both employee and freelance jobs	95.0	38.8	5.7	50.5	5.0
Did not work	57.5	48.5	4.9	4.1	42.5
Male youths					
Worked	89.2	57.5	11.5	20.2	10.8
Employee jobs only	90.3	85.4	1.4	3.6	9.7
Freelance jobs only	85.1	26.6	30.2	28.3	14.9
Both employee and freelance jobs	93.2	40.0	5.9	47.4	6.8
Did not work	58.7	50.7	4.1	3.8	41.3
Female youths					
Worked	90.5	41.1	15.4	34.0	9.5
Employee jobs only	89.1	81.9	1.6	5.6	10.9
Freelance jobs only	88.4	17.8	28.8	41.7	11.6
Both employee and freelance jobs	96.5	37.8	5.5	53.1	3.5
Did not work	56.1	46.0	5.7	4.5	43.9

NOTE: The National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997 consists of young men and women who were ages 12 to 16 on December 31, 1996.

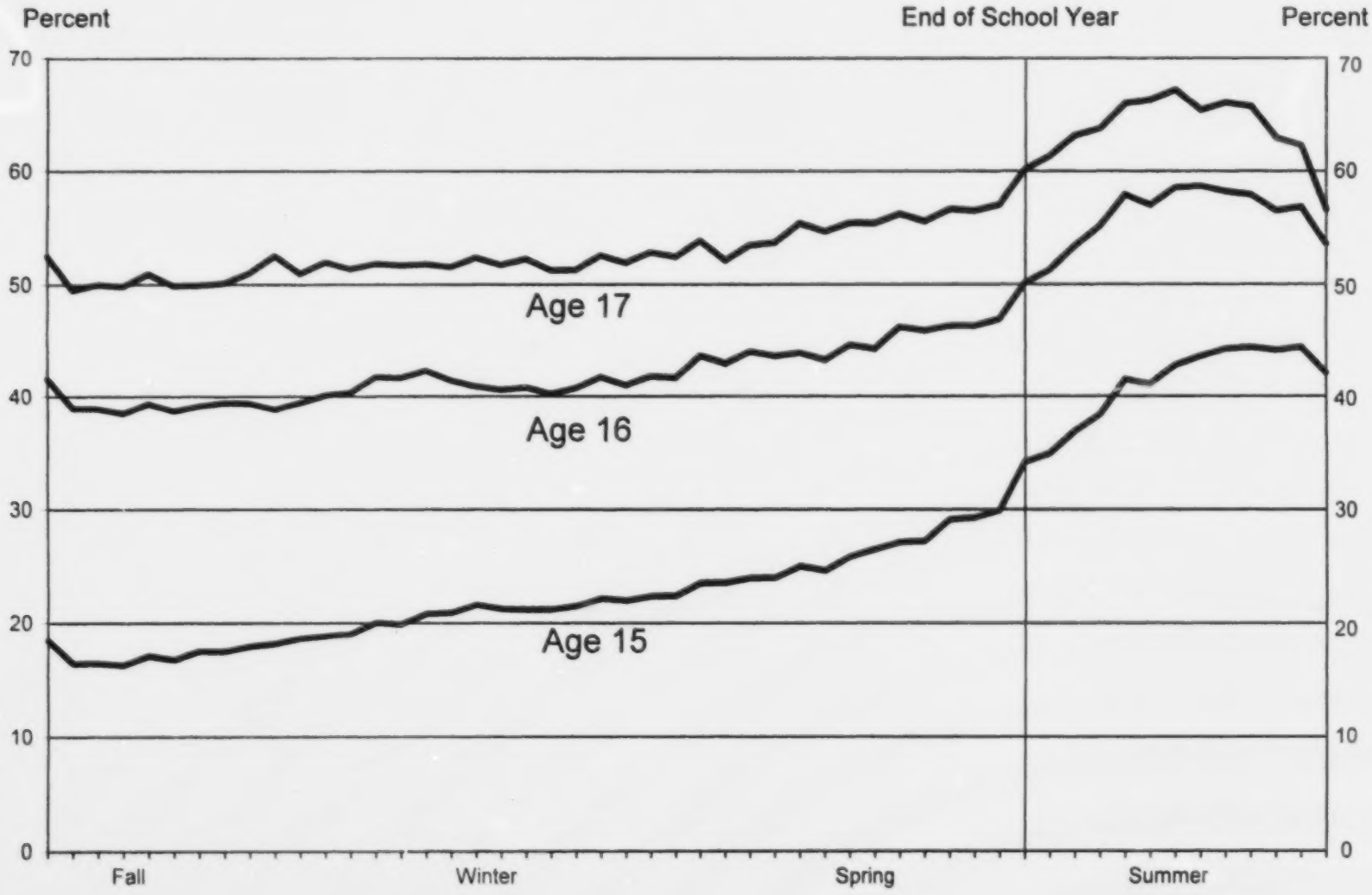
Table 6. Employment status of youths while age 17 in 1994-2000 by their employment status at age 16

(Percent)

Employment status while age 16	Worked while age 17				Did not work while age 17
	Total	Employee jobs only	Freelance jobs only	Both employee and freelance jobs	
Total					
Worked	90.7	70.2	5.8	14.6	9.3
Employee jobs only	91.3	88.0	.5	2.9	8.6
Freelance jobs only	78.1	25.9	30.7	21.5	21.9
Both employee and freelance jobs	96.3	49.9	5.3	41.2	3.7
Did not work	56.7	49.2	4.0	3.5	43.3
Male youths					
Worked	89.1	73.4	4.1	11.6	10.9
Employee jobs only	90.6	86.7	.4	3.4	9.4
Freelance jobs only	71.3	26.1	23.3	22.0	28.7
Both employee and freelance jobs	95.1	53.0	5.7	36.5	4.9
Did not work	56.9	52.6	2.1	2.2	43.1
Female youths					
Worked	91.7	66.9	7.7	17.1	7.7
Employee jobs only	92.4	89.6	.5	2.3	7.6
Freelance jobs only	83.3	25.8	36.3	21.2	16.7
Both employee and freelance jobs	97.1	47.8	5.0	44.3	2.9
Did not work	56.5	45.5	6.1	4.9	43.6

NOTE: The National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997 consists of young men and women who were ages 12 to 16 on December 31, 1996.

Percent of enrolled youths working in employee jobs each week of the fall 1998 - spring 1999 school year and following summer by age on September 1, 1998



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